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# MONTANA BEEF IN SCHOOLS

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## DID YOU KNOW?

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**April 2012**

- **The Montana Department of Agriculture can help you** to find sources for Montana beef, as well as other local products. Contact our Marketing Officers with specific requests:

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### MEATS

Marty Earnheart

(406) 444-9126

[mearnheart@mt.gov](mailto:mearnheart@mt.gov)

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### OTHER LOCAL PRODUCTS

Angie DeYoung

(406) 444-5424

[adeyoung@mt.gov](mailto:adeyoung@mt.gov)

- **Montana schools can purchase beef directly from both State and Federally-inspected meat plants.** There has been some confusion in the past as to a school's limitation to purchase beef only from Federally-inspected plants – this is not the case. Of course, there may be school policies, local ordinances, or foodservice distributor requirements that you must follow. However, if no policies or ordinances preclude you, and you can purchase directly from the processor (instead of through a foodservice distributor), it is legal for you to purchase beef from either a State or Federally-inspected meat plant. See the enclosed Montana Meat Processors map and corresponding Montana Beef Sources list for contact information.
- **There is a difference between wet vs. dry-aged beef, and it may help you save money.**

Dry-aged beef, the process of choice for most Montana beef processors, is beef that has been hung to dry for several weeks, resulting in moisture evaporation from the muscle. The key effect of dry aging is the concentration and saturation of the natural flavor.

Wet-aged beef is beef that has typically been aged in a vacuum-sealed bag to retain its moisture. This is the dominant mode of aging beef sold through most national foodservice distributors today. Wet-aging is popular because it takes less time (typically only a few days) and none of the weight (moisture) is lost in the process.

What does this mean for you? This means that when you buy dry-aged beef, you're paying for up to 1/3 less of the moisture content (i.e. water, when compared to wet-aged beef). In a recent trial, we found that when equal portions of raw dry-aged vs. raw wet-aged ground beef were cooked, the wet-aged beef lost nearly an ounce in weight, whereas the Montana dry-aged beef lost around a half an ounce, resulting in a lower cooked unit cost for the Montana beef (dollars per cooked pound of meat). Therefore, based on our 2011 experiment, **schools can purchase Montana beef (Choice, 88/12) at a price of up to \$3.05/lb (uncooked) and still receive better or equal value than typical foodservice wet-aged beef.**

- **Montana beef processors can help you with sourcing Montana beef** and with coordinating distribution back to your school. This means that while you can purchase directly from a rancher, and we encourage you to do so if you have the means, you can also leave this work up to the beef processors, saving you time and energy. For a list of Montana beef processors who have indicated to us their willingness and interest in helping Montana schools source Montana beef, see the enclosed Montana Meat Processors map and corresponding Montana Beef Sources list.
- **There are some Montana school foodservice directors who are successfully sourcing Montana beef** for their schools while staying within their budgets for food and labor costs. In fact, in some cases, the directors have found that local food (including beef) increases their student meal participation numbers! To learn more, contact two such foodservice directors:

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ROBIN VOGLER

Somers Lakeside School

(406) 857-3661

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SALLEY YOUNG

Greenfield Elementary, Fairfield

(406) 788-5526 or (406) 463-2578

- **Montana law allows for procurement exemption.** Montana law allows state public institutions the option to prioritize “local” over “lowest bid” by taking advantage of an optional exemption from the Montana Procurement Act in the purchasing of Montana-produced food. This optional exemption, enacted in 2007, gives public institutions more flexibility to buy Montana-produced food, unless the purchases are made using federal dollars. The law requires that food purchasers stay within their current budgets. What this means is that an institution may pay more for Montana-produced food items, including beef, as long as the extra cost can be made up on other less expensive items or substitutions. “Montana-produced” is defined broadly in the law to mean products that were “planted, cultivated, grown, harvested, raised, collected, or manufactured” in Montana.
- **If a Montana rancher wants to donate a whole or half beef, you can say “yes!”**
  - 1.) Make sure that there are no local ordinances or school policies that preclude you from accepting this donation.
  - 2.) Contact a processor (Custom-Exempt, State, or Federally-inspected)
  - 3.) Coordinate distribution from the ranch to the processor and then back to the school, provide processing instructions (cuts, fat content, packaging, etc.)
  - 4.) Pay for the processing. The rancher often can help locate and coordinate with the processor; however, if the rancher cannot help with this coordination, contact Marty Earnheart (see page 1) for help.

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THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MONTANA BEEF IN  
MONTANA SCHOOLS. WE’RE HERE TO HELP YOU, SO CALL US ANY TIME!

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